

IAEA Scientific Forum 2010
“Cancer in Developing Countries: Facing the Challenge”
Report to the 54th General Conference
Dr. Twalib A. Ngoma

Mr. President, Director General, Distinguished Delegates

I am pleased and honoured to be given this opportunity to present to the General Conference my report on the IAEA Scientific Forum 2010, whose theme was *Cancer in Developing Countries: Facing the Challenge*.

Mr. President

When the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were set, priority was given to HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis. As a result of this, cancer and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were marginalized in the global development agenda.

However, today, cancer and other non-communicable diseases are the major causes of death globally accounting for more than double the number of deaths from malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS combined.

Statistics show that the majority of cancer cases and deaths today occur in developing countries, some of which are so poorly equipped to respond to the looming crisis. It is estimated that by 2030, over 13 million people worldwide will die from cancer every year and that 9 million of these deaths will be in developing countries.

Mr. President,

In view of the above, and the lack of global awareness about the enormous magnitude of cancer in developing countries, the Director General decided to make cancer control the highest priority of the Agency in his first year of office. He also decided to make it the theme of this week's Scientific Forum. It brought together the entire spectrum of people committed to fight cancer - governments, World Health Organisation (WHO) and other international organizations, NGOs, including Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), Livestrong Foundation, Breast Health Global Initiative (BHGI), doctors, advocates, industry, and many individuals from the public and media.

During the opening session, the Director General stressed that the aim of the Forum was to give the participants an opportunity to learn more about how best to work together to fight cancer in developing countries. He expressed the hope that at the end of the Scientific Forum, all the participants would have a better understanding of what they could do to contribute to the fight against cancer.

He noted that, at the international level, work on cancer control is fragmented and cancer is an overlooked aspect of global health. There was therefore a need to address this by strengthening international cooperation, building public – private partnerships and mobilizing new resources. The Director General further said that the IAEA partnership with WHO is vital and a great example of international organizations working together in a common cause. The DG stressed that although the international organizations cannot build cancer care infrastructures in developing countries, they can assist by providing training, expertise and advice, and by helping to ensure that the voice of developing countries is heard. For example, the Agency's Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) is working with a growing number of Member States. PACT bridges the gap between the work of the IAEA in human health and the work

underway in developing countries to establish comprehensive cancer care networks.

Mr. President

The Scientific Forum was fortunate to have two first ladies at the opening session, who are already bringing their influence to bear at the highest level. The first lady of Mongolia told the conference that cancer is the second main cause of death in her country and said “It is unacceptable that we let our people die at their prime age because of a disease which is both preventable and treatable, at the age when they would have otherwise lived and enjoyed the beauties of life and contributed to the good of humankind”.

Egypt’s First lady reminded us not to lose sight of the ultimate goal of eradicating cancer. To those who say we will not find a cure for cancer, she said: “ Sixty years ago they said the same about polio. They were wrong then and I sincerely hope they will be wrong now”

After the opening session, a simulated tumour board was held, in which a multi-disciplinary team of doctors – including radiation oncologists, medical oncologists and surgeons – discussed the best treatment for a hypothetical patient with breast cancer.

Subsequent sessions dealt with Cancer as part of the Global health Agenda, Bringing Partners together, IAEA’s role in combating cancer, Emerging technologies: challenges and Opportunities and safe and appropriate use of New Radiation Medicine Technology in New Surroundings. There was hope, passion and energy in the discussions and some heart-rending stories. There was a young radiation oncologist from Malawi, the only one in his country, who has no

radiotherapy equipment and can only prescribe chemotherapy. There were surgeons who said they can only offer mastectomies to breast cancer patients rather than less disfiguring lumpectomies because they have no radiotherapy facilities.

The details of the technology and resource gap in the real world were discussed. The critical need for Government support in the development of health systems was recognised. In this connection, the IAEA's significant role in providing radiation medicine know-how and training was acknowledged to be a key component of the fight against cancer. The development of partnerships through PACT around technology, training and services was recommended. The need to put in place regulations for the safe and appropriate use of radiation medicine technology was stressed. There was general agreement in the Scientific Forum that having cancer as part of the Global Development Agenda is an essential prerequisite for addressing the growing cancer problem in developing countries.

Mr. President

Finally after two days of intense and productive deliberations the Scientific Conference closed with the following recommendations:

1. The Agency should maintain the priority given to cancer within its programmes and in particular continue to support, allocate and mobilize resources for the implementation of its cancer related programme
2. The Agency should continue to advocate for a comprehensive approach to cancer control, from prevention to palliative care, integrating the safe and effective use of radiation medicine in close cooperation with WHO.

3. The Agency should strive to further pursue the necessary steps to place cancer on the development agenda and to support the cancer control capacity building efforts to its member states
4. The Agency, Member States and NGOs should actively participate in the UN General Assembly debate and discussions on the review of the MDGs. The participants in the Scientific Conference firmly believe that the support of world leaders and the UN system is crucial to turn the focus on the impact of cancer and other NCDs across the developing world.

In summary, the Scientific Forum concluded that there was indeed a need for International Organizations to put cancer on the development agenda. The message the participants took away was one of hope, and an expectation that this must be a continuing process whose momentum must be maintained to make sure that cancer in developing countries get the top level recognition it deserves.

Thank you, Mr President.